

“THE SPIRIT MAKES US ONE.”

This declaration of the kingdom life has not yet been fully realized, just like our eschatological hope. Historically speaking, we often wonder if this ideal has even been inaugurated. Indeed, the church's history of division from the early years makes us wonder if this is going to be at all possible. At one point in history, the church with powerful political influence appeared to have brought unity to God's people, but it was never truly bonded.

The modern day ecumenical movement through the World Council of Churches (WCC) has less than a quarter of world Christianity under its banner. To begin with, the Roman Catholic Church is not part of it, as well as many of the Evangelical and ever-growing Pentecostal-Charismatic groups. In fact, often some ecumenical churches acted exactly unecumenically, while Evangelicals and conservatives continued their crusade for Christian “truth” as often (too) narrowly defined. In part, the creation of an Evangelical theological association in Asia may be attributed to the less-ecumenical, less-inclusive, and less-embracing attitude of the older, mainline and thus ecumenical theological association. With the steady decrease in membership and financial resources among the mainline churches, practical and fundamental questions as to the role of the WCC have been raised from within as well as without. For this reason, the creation of the Global Christian Forum is a radical move to create a neutral space for the “majority” Christian world to participate in dialogue and ultimately Christian cooperation. This idea, quite dangerous with its potential to make the WCC obsolete, may be viewed as the most significant contribution of the world body toward the unity of the Christian church. The record reveals that its three global consultations were well attended by Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, mainline, Evangelical and Pentecostal delegates, and sufficient trust and consensus among the participants have been built to launch its regional consultations.

The Asian Consultation of the Global Christian Forum was convened in Hong Kong between April 30 and May 4, 2004. A press release provides details of its meetings, as included here.

Global Christian Forum
Asia Consultation
“Jesus Christ in Asia—Our Journey with Him”

Around sixty Christians from a broad range of traditions and organizations—including Anglican, Catholic, Evangelical, Mar Thoma, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Protestant, Salvation Army, the Christian Conference of Asia, Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences and World Vision—came together in Hong Kong for the purpose of reflecting on our journey together with Jesus Christ in Asia.

This coming together was the initiative of the Global Christian Forum process. It provided space for us as Asian Christians from different traditions to meet with each other and to listen to one another’s “faith journey,” as well as our particular struggles and challenges in different situations in Asia, with all its plurality. We experienced a fresh sense of unity under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and a shared passion for participating in his mission in the world.

Arising out of this sharing we developed a new awareness of one another’s existence and spirituality, and with it the importance of each other in being churches in Asia. We affirm that we need to build bridges that would facilitate co-operation in order to have a united voice in confronting the various issues facing Asia. We acknowledge that this in no way means that we would lose our individual identity or distinctiveness. We acknowledge the need to respect and uphold this diversity, among those who confess that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ as perfect in his divinity and humanity. In this spirit, we need to establish trust, openness, honesty, love and humility as we work with one another.

We affirm the need for an emphasis on holiness of life and prayer for the fostering of unity amongst us, and a deepening and strengthening of our participation in God’s mission in his world. We commit ourselves to explore together models for working, studying and addressing issues which are of common concern, notably poverty, oppression and religious intolerance.

We further affirm the need to work together and continue this initiative at the regional, national and local level. We urge the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, the Christian Conference of Asia and Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences to assist in forwarding this initiative.

4 May 2004, Hong Kong

The real question we should ask now as Asian Pentecostals is: “How about us?” Have we, as people of the Spirit, been conscious of Jesus’

priestly prayer that we may be one, and the truth that the Spirit was given explicitly so that we may be one? What have we learned from the short history of the modern Pentecostal movement? Or have we examined it? The Pentecostal movement is taking the globe like a storm, and many traditional churches, often with decreasing spiritual dynamic, have been genuinely interested in us.

As Pentecostals have found for the first time a place in being a meaningful participant in forging Christian unity with many older traditional churches, what should our response be? Will we still remain at arms length because we are just different from them? Or are we still apprehensive of such ecumenical initiative? As many participants expressed, are western denominationalism and their missionaries a significant hindrance in forging Christian cooperation in Asia?

It is noted that while the last paragraph of the summary sheet was composed, it occurred to everyone that we Pentecostals have no network in Asia to become an entity like, for example, the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia has been. Then would it be necessary to form a fellowship of Asian Pentecostal churches?

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EDITORIAL NOTES

The editors welcome Dr. Joseph Suico to the editorial team from this issue. Also Dr. Peter Kuzmic is the latest addition to the respected editorial Board of the journal.

The editors are also pleased to announce the publication of the first title in the AJPS Series. For order information, see the order form as well as an advertisement found in this journal issue.

The next issue (8:1, Jan 2005) is devoted to "Pentecostalism in the Philippines" and Dr. Suico is the principle editor for this issue. For any suggestions or proposals, please contact the journal office.